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SUBJECT: MALAYSIA: TIP WORKSHOP FOR JOURNALISTS - A FIRST.

11. (SBU) Summary and Comment: A November 10-11 U.S. Embassy sponsored "Workshop on Reporting on Trafficking in Persons" in Kuala Lumpur allowed an audience of 40 Malaysian journalists and editors to exchange views about trafficking in persons (TIP) issues in an off-the-record setting. It also featured senior GOM officials speaking frankly about Malaysia's efforts, and shortcomings, in addressing the issue. Each official's presentation made mention of "why Malaysia is on Tier 3" (of the 2009 TIP report), and praised USG-sponsored TIP training. The DCM opened the conference with introductory remarks and Poloff participated as a panel member and presented more detail on the U.S. approach and objectives on TIP. Malaysian officials, journalists and NGO activists provided perspectives on addressing and reporting on human trafficking. Representatives of UNICEF and the International Organization on Migration (IOM), delivered presentations on child-trafficking and an overview of human trafficking in the region. The Head of Prosecutions from the Attorney General's Chambers, Tun Majid, headlined the opening panel discussion. Media covered the closing ceremony of the event and reported on GOM attendance in newspapers and in November 11 nightly news broadcasts. Journalists who attended the workshop praised the Embassy for organizing such an event. It was the first time for many of the journalists and NGO's to have extended interactions on TIP with Malaysian law enforcement officials, and vice versa. The longer term value of the workshop can only be measured by the quality and depth of future reporting on trafficking in persons issues in Malaysia. End Summary and Comment.

12. (SBU) On November 10-11, the U.S. Embassy sponsored a "Workshop on Reporting on Trafficking in Persons" in Kuala Lumpur to a group of 40 Malaysian journalists and editors. The workshop provided an off-the-record setting for journalists to exchange views about TIP issues. The DCM opened the conference with remarks focused on the priority the USG places on TIP, our interest in working in partnership with the GOM in combating this problem, and the importance of the media in raising TIP public awareness. Senior GOM officials present spoke frankly about Malaysia's efforts, and shortcomings, in addressing TIP. Officials from the Attorney General's Chambers, Royal Malaysian Police, and the Ministry of Women, Family, and Community Development joined Poloff on the seminar's main panel. The Head of Prosecutions from the Attorney General's Chambers, Tun Majid, acknowledged that the GOM had trouble with victim protection, noting that victims were often scared and intimidated when held in prison-like shelters. He explained that the GOM is considering amending its Anti-TIP Act so that NGOs such as Tenaganita could assist and shelter TIP victims. (Note: On the margins of the workshop, Tenaganita TIP Coordinator Aegile Fernandez said she believed her NGO may soon receive the official "gazetting" under the law to allow sheltering TIP victims. End Note). Tun Madjid also parried a journalist's question about whether the USG's TIP ranking system, and Malaysia's Tier three ranking, was unfair, given that other countries in the region were not low-ranked, by saying that there was no denying that Malaysia had a TIP problem, was not doing enough on enforcement, and that "we (Malaysians) are to blame."

13. (SBU) The Deputy Director of the Royal Malaysian Police

Criminal Investigation Department, Acryl Sani, gave a generally balanced presentation, although he, like many Malaysian officials, confused trafficking and smuggling, and he made no mention of labor trafficking. Mr. Harjit Singh from the Ministry of Women, Family, and Community Development said Minister Shahrizat had recently visited the Indonesian Embassy in KL to talk to rescued maids, most of whom claimed never to have been paid, some for as long as three years. Mr. Singh also discussed the need to address labor trafficking and noted that the GOM is creating its first men's shelter which will be run by the Immigration Department. He also said that the Women's Ministry was setting up a hotline for maids to report abuse.

14. (SBU) The 40 journalists in attendance were initially reticent but began to open up when a panel of Malaysian journalists discussed their own difficulties in investigating and reporting on TIP issues. Hariati Azizan from "The Star" newspaper said that she didn't want to rely on alleged victims' accounts of abuse only, but had trouble getting GOM officials to comment on trafficking allegations. Many participants echoed this complaint, a common problem for journalists working on any story that involves getting information from government officials. Muzli Mohamed Zin, Executive Editor at the "Malay Mail," said he became determined to learn more about trafficking after he interviewed one of 20 young Indonesian women rescued in a police raid after being held for months in a warehouse, let out only at night by their captors to "entertain" guests at a karaoke bar. He agreed with Azizan that editors who lack personal experience investigating trafficking stories, are often reluctant to place trafficking stories; a common excuse

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heard is that "the stories all sound the same."

15. (SBU) During a workshop discussion focused on "outsourcing" (hiring laborers from abroad to work in Malaysia), journalists heard from two representatives of the Indonesian NGO Migrant Care, who said that young semi-skilled Indonesian workers have become unwittingly involved in illicit and illegal work situations. Many migrant workers sign on to work in Malaysia and travel here with legal documents, only to find themselves victims of human trafficking when their legal migration turns into an illegal bonded- or forced-labor situation. They are shuttled between factories around Malaysia, and given work subject to the vagaries of demand for labor tied to the number of orders that factories receive. Companies (mainly small and medium sized factories) participate in this practice because it enables them to take on semi-skilled labor easily and quickly when they need to add manpower, and to reduce their workforce just as easily when orders slow down again.

16. (SBU) On the margins of the workshop, Tenaganita's Fernandez voiced her frustration that there was as yet no GOM response to her organization's filing of three detailed labor trafficking cases, starting in July, alleging that "outsourcing" companies, some with reported links to the Home Affairs ministry, are systematically bringing in large numbers of fee-paying workers, numbering far beyond those needed for legitimate job placements, and then holding the excess workers for "sale" to various employers. She had met with Tun Majid of the Attorney General's Office about this issue and through his assistance, later met with Home Affairs officials. She said there has been no follow-up to-date by the GOM since those meetings.

17. (SBU) Joshua Wong, a journalist with the local television station "ntv7," investigated and produced a four-part television story on the trafficking of Burmese Rohingya refugees across the Malaysia-Thai border involving the collusion of Malaysian immigration officials. His story aired in early 2008 on the ntv7 Chinese-language program "Siasat Mandarin." Mr. Wong's presentation was one of the most valuable sessions of the two-day event. His

investigation into trafficking took several months, involved numerous informants and sources, and presented the journalist with numerous dilemmas -- such as whether or not to reveal his sources, the degree of risk he could take in order to get his story, and whether or not to show the faces of his sources. He did so in the case of one refugee who insisted that he not remain anonymous as he was fed up with his treatment and wanted things to change. Wong said that an Immigration Department official he interviewed warned him to "be patriotic" by not reporting that Immigration officials were complicit in trafficking, hinting that the TV station's license could be withdrawn. The fact that Wong's expose aired only in Mandarin Chinese is notable. His presentation offered many valuable lessons to his fellow journalists, and sparked a discussion about the role of the journalist in fighting human trafficking, and "how close is too close" when working with the police and other government officials in researching a story.

18. (SBU) The workshop was funded by the Public Affairs Section through a grant to the Malaysian Press Institute (MPI), a quasi-governmental organization focused on providing training and skills development to journalists in Malaysia and the Southeast Asian region. UNICEF staff from Bangkok traveled to Kuala Lumpur to participate at no charge, and the participation of an IOM representative from Bangkok and two Migrant Care representatives from Jakarta came about through travel grants to those individuals. IOM's interest in being at the workshop stemmed from their hope that they may someday be able to make their presence in Malaysia official. Senior level police and AG Office attendance was a surprise and came about in large part because of effective contact work by POL section and Legatt over the past several months.

KEITH